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THE NEW GLOBAL JIHADIST:

EXTREMIST REASSESSMENTS OF VIOLENT JIHAD

IN A CHANGING MIDDLE EAST

By

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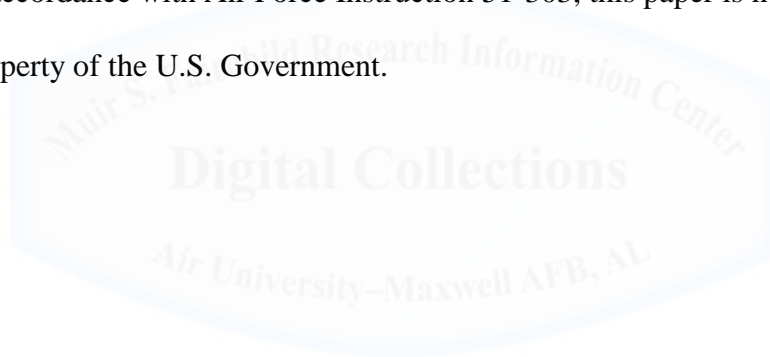
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PREFACE

This research paper, while exhilarating to write, was akin to running in shifting sand, or to quote my research advisor, Dr. Ledlow, "Shooting a moving a target." That said it was an amazing opportunity to discuss and write about an issue that is still developing, even as I reluctantly close this phase of my research. I can only hope I did a small amount of justice to a topic of such importance. The changing face of the Middle East is understandably a source of trepidation for many people. Tracking the weekly, even daily change in such a volatile region was a daunting task, and weaving it into my assessments was even more difficult. Having spent, as most of my peers have, a fair amount of time in this region, I can only cling to the optimism that the reformist movements discussed in this paper represent an opportunity for real change in a region gasping for growth and freedom. The purpose of this research paper was to point out the individuals and organizations that are part of this change in ideology, and may become players in the growing reformist movements. Their motives may not be completely pure, but they represent a departure from the dogma of violence we are all too familiar with in this region.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my ever-patient fiancée for indulging my late nights writing and rewriting sessions these past few weeks as I zeroed in on my "moving target." I could not have accomplished this without her steadfast support, and I can now begin helping with the wedding we have planned for next month! I would also like to extend many thanks to my fellow ACSC students for their assistance throughout my studies, and to my advisor Dr. Marcia Ledlow for her sage advice on my research.

ABSTRACT

From the end of 2010 to the beginning of 2011, a shift began in Tunisia that swept through the Middle East like a wildfire. There was widespread call for reform and democracy. At the time of this writing, that fire had spread to Egypt, Libya, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Lebanon. Many are unaware, however, of a similar shift that had occurred in the Jihadist ranks several years earlier.

In late 2007, several prominent Jihadist figures started to presented new, moderate interpretations of Jihad. These recent revisionist documents on Jihad, coupled with the recent shifts in power in the region, potentially represented a unique crossroads within the Islamic community. This shift could present the United States with the opportunity to employ diplomatic and informational instruments of power to promote the growth of this movement. This research paper will explore the changes in radical ideology based on case study research of Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and the Muslim Brotherhood, and will examine the application of soft power to the growing reformist movement in the Middle East.

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

*The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word 'crisis.' One brush
stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of
the danger - but recognize the opportunity.*

- President John F. Kennedy,
Indianapolis, 1959

The Middle East has long been a conundrum for US foreign policy. Racked by
dissent and violence, rampant with extremist ideology, and the center of global conflict
for a generation, the Middle East occupies center stage as the US has struggles for a
diplomatic, economic and even military solution to the region's issues. The revisionist
Islamist ideology in 2007 coupled with the reformist political movement in early 2011
represents a new opportunity for US efforts in the region.

Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, al Qaeda strategist and former Egyptian Islamic Jihad
leader, released "Rationalizing Jihadist Action in Egypt and the World" outlining a new
analysis of Jihad and the way it should be carried out. In November of 2009, after two
years of secret negotiations with the Libyan government, the Libyan Islamic Fighting
Group (LIFG) released "The Book of Correctional Studies" outlining the limitations of
waging Jihad; specifically, the killing of civilians, women and children. The Egyptian
Muslim Brotherhood, which disavowed violence in the early 1970's, has reorganized
itself over the years as a grassroots outreach program. With the ouster of Egyptian
President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is poised
to be a major political player in the new democracy of Egypt.

Skepticism is understandable since Jihadists currently imprisoned in Egyptian and
Libyan jails wrote many of the documents discussed in this paper. However, these
writings may still represent a credible, alternate view on al Qaeda's global Jihad, and a

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threat to their operations. These documents and their importance do beg the question: *What is the potential impact of recent cases of moderate, nonviolent reinterpretation of Jihad by former Islamic extremists and recent reformist protests throughout the region?* This paper will address the revisionist movements by prominent Jihadists and examine their effect on extremism, politics and religion within a shifting Middle Eastern landscape where reform movements are sweeping from country to country.

SECTION II - BACKGROUND

The concept and doctrine of Jihad has been examined and debated extensively in the United States over the last decade, and with good reason. For many, understanding the ideology of Jihad and its place within Islam provides a window of understanding into foreign interpretations of justice, war, peace, and God. While Jihad is only a small facet of the Muslim faith, it does act as the fulcrum or pivot point for Islamic ideology to slip from interpretive religious doctrine into violent, extremist dogma. There are, in fact, multiple meanings to Jihad, and within one meaning there may be many types of Jihad dependent on the issues, people, or places involved in the conflict. Based on these criteria some groups even draw a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of violent Jihad.[1]

Jihad's literal definition is struggle, and there are two specific categories of struggle. The first, and most familiar, is the outward manifestation of this struggle in the form of armed conflict against nonbelievers.[2] This struggle plays out around the world in the form of suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices, ambushes, assassinations, and direct combat between Global Jihadists and US forces. The religious legality of

these tactics, under the auspices of Jihad, is hotly debated among religious scholars, and depends on the cleric's or religious authority's interpretation of the action.

An examination of Jihad also reveals it exists in two distinct areas of the Muslim consciousness. First, Jihad exists as a collective duty to protect the Muslim faith and people, and second, as an individual duty inherent to the living of a pious Muslim life.[3] This collective and individual calling to Jihad creates a powerful tool for recruitment by extremist groups by appealing to a collectivist sense of duty and an individual sense of religious fulfillment.

The second understanding of Jihad, and the definition embraced by many moderate believers, is the struggle of the heart and tongue to lead a devout life in the eyes of Allah. One *hadith* or narrative describes Mohammed's thoughts after returning from a battle where he says, "We have returned from the lesser Jihad (*al-jihad al-asghar*) to the greater Jihad (*al-jihad al-akbar*)." When asked, "What is the greater Jihad?" he replied, "It is the struggle against oneself."[4] Islamic scholars still debate the validity of this *hadith*, but it still serves to highlight the disparate sources of Jihad. The internal struggle with oneself to live within the five pillars of Islam is an extension of the individual calling to Jihad for all Muslims.

Doctrinal Tenets of Jihad

Effectively discussing the extremist ideology of specific Jihadist groups first requires an analysis of the elements of Islam used as an ideological springboard to violence. For the extremist, interpretations of the Islamic teachings provide guidance on what conditions permit a Muslim to attack and kill other Muslims, and which violations of faith permit violence. These teachings on the tenets of Islam allow a Jihadist to

interpret the Qur'an to sanction the outward Jihad discussed earlier, specifically in the form of armed conflict against nonbelievers.

Salafism and Global Jihad

Global Jihadism has its roots within the Salafist movement of the twentieth century. This intellectually forward reformist ideology started with the progressive goal of creating a path to Muslim modernism free of western influence. As Salafism took hold in Egypt during the 1950's and 1960's there was a belief that a return a pure and unadulterated vision of Islam was the path to a true Islamic society.[5] Salafist ideology found its voice through the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and their spokesperson Sayyid Qutb. Their philosophy maintained that due to influx of western influences, the social and political systems in Egypt were immoral, and it was the duty of any true Muslim "vanguard" to transform society through preaching and Jihad.[6] The final goal of these Muslin "vanguards" was *hakimiyyah,* or the rule of law through Allah.[7] Qutb's call for the purification of Egypt's social and political order required the faithful, by violent means if necessary, "remove the pre-Islamic ignorance from the leadership of men," and any government founded on "man's rule of man and humanity's worship of humanity" must also be eliminated.[8]

As this ideology spread throughout the Middle East and Africa, the Salafist came to reject all Islamic teachings or political movements that did not strictly comply with the Qur'an, the *Hadith*, and *Shari'ah* or Islamic law. Salafist doctrine later morphed with Saudi Wahabist interpretations of Islam to create the Jihadist belief structure.[9] One crucial difference between the Salafist and the Jihadist is while Salafists eventually came

to renounce the use of violence in order to bring *Shari'ah* to a Muslim country, Jihadists embraced violence as a central tenet of their ideology and identity.[10]

Aqidah – The Islamic Creed

Jihadist thought centers around establishing an Islamic creed or *aqidah* that aligns one as closely as possible with the tenets of faith in the Qur'an, the *Hadith*, and *Shari'ah*.[11] One aspect of the Jihadist *aqidah* is their rejection of certain groups of Muslims as corrupt or nonbelievers. The groups included in this list comprise most Muslims who do not

Figure 1

adhere to the Jihadist doctrine or heed their call for violent Jihad. These groups include those perceived to pervert the true teachings and interpretations of Islam (*Al-Zanadiqah*), and those who embrace Western lifestyles outside of the tenets of Islam (ahl ul-Fisq wal-Mujoon).[12]

Tawhid – Divine Unity with Allah

Jihadists also pursue an oneness with God or *Tawhid,* with the goal of bringing all true Muslims together in their unity of belief. This unity of belief must adhere to the fundamentalist tenets and interpretation of the Qur'an, *Hadith*, and *Shari'ah*. It is not permissible, under this unity of belief, to support a democratic or non-Shari'ah government. Doing so would undermine the authority of Allah and his rule of law
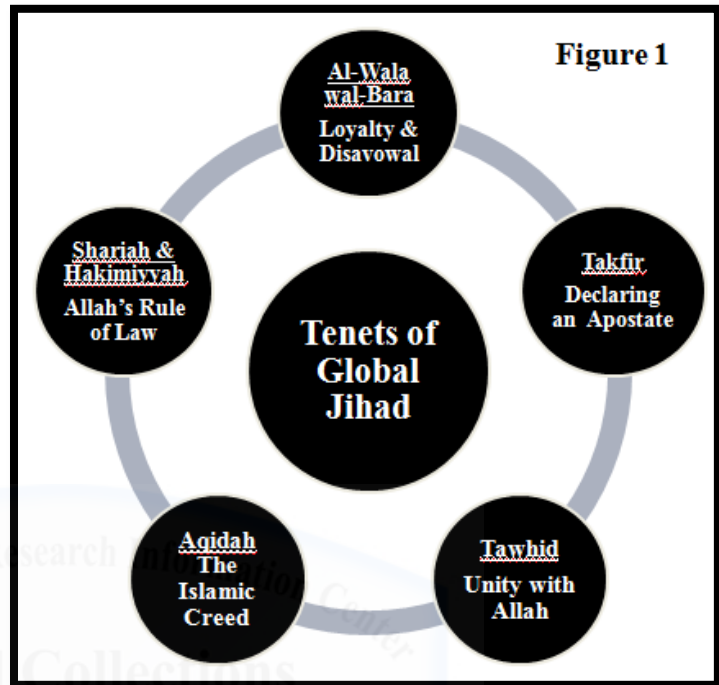
through *hakimiyyah*.[13] *Tawhid*, in the eyes of the Jihadist, separates true believers from imposters of faith. In order for a Muslim to be true in his *tawhid* he must pronounce and assert his faith, be certain in his knowledge, accept and submit to God, disavow anyone who fails to believe, and be willing to die for that belief.[14] Failure to observe the tenets of *tawhid* or supporting a secular or non-Shari'ah government is an affront to God and a cause for violent resistance in the eyes of the Jihadist.

Takfir – Declaring One a Religious Apostate

Those who fail in the Jihadist interpretation of *tawhid* are a religious apostate (infidel or nonbeliever) and are outside the tenets of Islam. This concept of *takfir* allows Jihadists to kill other Muslims, who, in the Jihadist's eyes have failed in their religious duties, and thus have ceased to be part of the believers. Typically, however, *takfir* is a rejection or excommunication of nonbelievers, or those who support or defend nonbelievers.[15] Only in the extreme cases do Jihadists push this rejection into the realm of direct violence against other Muslims. This is a delicate subject for Jihadists, since it is difficult to label a fellow Muslim an apostate except through the most extreme interpretations of Islamic teachings. The Salafist representative Sayyid Qutb wrote, "Any society is a *jahili* society (ignorant of God) which does not dedicate itself to submission to God alone, in its beliefs and ideas, in its observances of worship, and in its 21 legal regulations… Lastly, all the existing so-called "Muslim" societies are also *jahili* societies."[16]

Similarly, the writings of Muhammad Ibn-Abd-al-Wahhab, the Islamic revivalist who reestablished the conservative Wahhabist doctrine in Saudi Arabia, expanded on this concept. Al-Wahhab believed *takfir* was applicable not only to societies and

governments, but to individual Muslims as well.[17] From these writings and teachings, spring the violent spread of Jihad beyond the auspices of repelling infidels and crusaders, and into the realm of attacking other Muslims for interpreted violations of the faith. The most extremist interpretations of *takfir* believe all Muslims must participate in Jihad against nonbelievers and that any who fails in this duty should be killed along with their families.[18]

Al-Wala wal-Bara – Loyalty and Disavowal for the Sake of Allah

The final concept of Jihad in need of examination is *Al-Wala wal-Bara*, which is a pledge of loyalty and love to Allah, and a pledge to disavow any who engage in deviant ideologies.[19] From the *Al-Wala wal-Bara* context Jihadists extrapolate whom to love and accept and whom to disavow as an enemy of the faith. Saeed al-Qahtani in his master's thesis on *Al-Wala wal-Bara* described the love/hate dichotomy of the Jihadist. "Love is the source of wala' and hate is the source of bara'; it is by this that both the heart and the hand are moved to act. Wala' inspires intimacy, concern and help. Bara' provokes obstruction, enmity and rejection. Wala' and Bara' are both related to the declaration of faith and constitute essential elements in it." [20] The concept of disavowing a nonbeliever can be for a multitude of infractions such as living in the land of non-Muslims, adopting their dress and customs, aiding non-Muslims or seeking aid from them, and showing compassion or forgiveness to a non-Muslim.[21] In the eyes of the Jihadist, these sins separate one from the faith, and the true Muslim community or *Umma.*

<h2 style="text-align:center">20th Century Jihad</h2>

Now that a firmer understanding of Jihad and the concepts of faith that create the foundation for Jihadist violence has been established, it is important to consider and assess prominent Jihadist groups' interpretations on the subject. Identifying the social,

political, and religious underpinnings of these groups will also supply an informative background on the roots of their ideology.

An examination of the rise of 20th century Jihadist violence would be incomplete without a discussion of the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group) and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. While similar in their interpretations and ideology, these groups also share a fervent desire to see the secular government in Egypt overthrown and a Shari'ah government installed. Each group, however, has had a varying path from Jihadist extremism to revisionist throughout the last half of the 20th century.

Timeline of Jihadist Rise and Revision

Figure 2
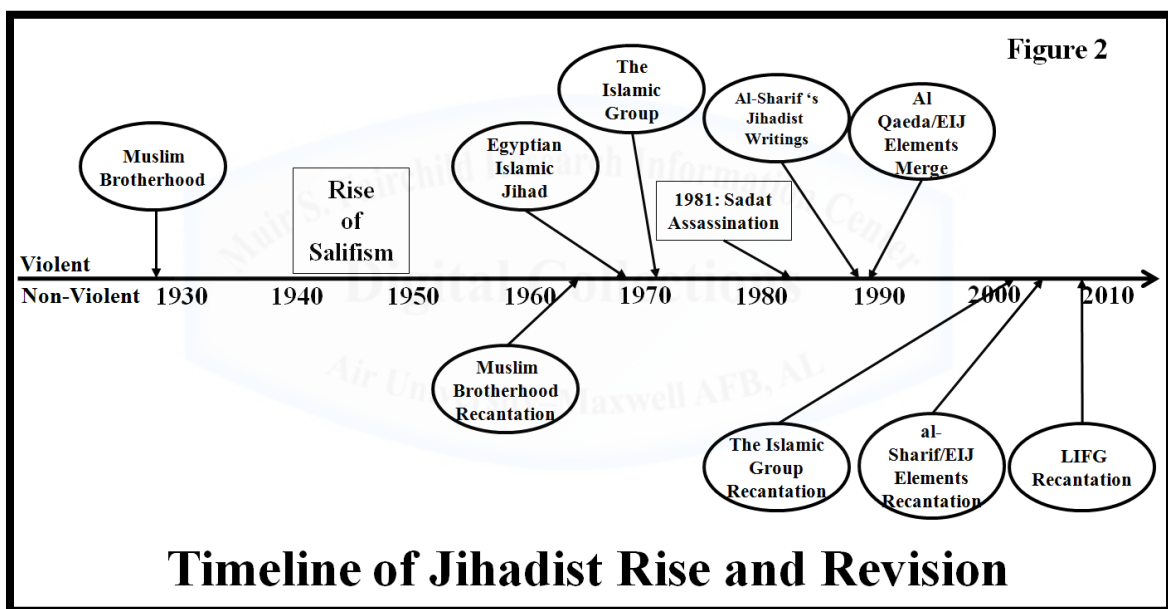
Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen (The Muslim Brotherhood)

Founded by Hasan al-Banna in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) provides not only an interesting example of extremist to revisionist theory, but also methodologies for the political employment of Islamist thought. Unlike the Islamic Group and Egyptian Islamic Jihad, who began as politically motivated student groups, the Muslim Brotherhood initially began under the auspices of religious community outreach.[22] The Muslim Brotherhood grew into a political group determined to see the rebirth of Egypt

outside of colonial rule and under *Shari'ah.* A crackdown against the Brotherhood had occurred in 1947 after the assassination of the Egyptian Prime Minister, with many of its leaders imprisoned, and its founder al-Banna assassinated.[23] The Special Apparatus, which functioned as the Muslim Brotherhood's paramilitary section, carried out bombings and assassinations against colonial forces until the Egyptian Army's military coup in 1952.[24] Further repression of the Muslim Brotherhood occurred after a failed attempt to assassinate President Nasser in 1954, resulting in a fracture within the group. Some members of the Muslim Brotherhood radicalized and espoused the Jihadist tenets of Sayyid Qutb, while others, under the new leadership of Hasan al-Hudaybi, promoted restraint and less violence as an avenue to change.[25]

In 1972, the Brotherhood renounced violence and pursued political action and community involvement. Repeated attempts by the Mubarak regime to suppress the Brotherhood were unsuccessful, culminating in 2005 with the Brotherhood winning 88 out of 444 seats in the Egyptian parliament.[26] They remained steadfastly opposed to violence as a means of Islamic governmental change, and have even come under fire from Jihadists for their moderate stance. In light of the historic events that occurred in Egypt in January 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood needs a deeper examination from a revisionist doctrine standpoint later in this paper.

Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group)

The Islamic Group began as a student union and became increasingly militant after the Muslim Brotherhood renounced violence in the 1970's. The group's grassroots origins in Upper Egypt adopted an extremist ideology and labeled the Egyptian government as an apostate regime because of their secular laws and peace with Israel.[27]

As the movement grew, so did the calls for violent action against the regime that had turned from God. This violated the tenets of *hakimiyyah* and *tawhid* in the eyes of the Islamic Group's leaders. The best known of these leaders, Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, imprisoned for the 1993 World Trade Center Bombings, labeled the Egyptian government *takfir*.[28] This resulted in widespread assassinations and bombings throughout Egypt, culminating in the 1997 attack at a resort in Luxor that killed 58 tourists and four Egyptians.[29]

Egyptian Islamic Jihad

The Egyptian Islamic Jihad formed in the late 1960's from Egyptian university students. Within this fledgling extremist group were two Jihadists who would have a global impact, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Sayyid Imam al-Sharif. Al-Zawahiri would go on to serve as al Qaeda's Chief Deputy. Sayyid Imam al-Sharif would become a leading Jihadist theorist whose writings were influential throughout the extremist world. His later recantations of violence, and his writings on the subject, have had just as deep an impact, and are discussed later in this paper. The Egyptian Islamic Jihad had a goal that mirrored the Islamic Group's -- to remove the secular Egyptian government and install system in line with *Shari'ah* law and *hakimiyyah*.[30] The Egyptian Islamic Jihad collaborated with the Islamic Group in the assassination of Egyptian President Sadat in 1981. Egyptian Islamic Jihad would continue its campaign of violence until, under al-Zawahiri's direction, elements of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad merged with al-Qaeda in 2001.[31]

These two groups provide a compelling backdrop for not only the ideological foundations of Jihadist thought, but also the reasoning behind moderate revisionist

interpretations on Jihad. An examination of these two groups' revisionist ideology will occur in later sections. In order to understand these reassessments of Jihad, it is crucial to understand what influences the realignments in ideology or beliefs that, in turn, lead to an individual or group walking away from terrorism.

SECTION III - DE-RADICALIZATION AND DISENGAGEMENT

Examining the process of de-radicalization and disengagement exists on two levels: individual and collective. While many view Jihadist movements as the collective action of like-minded Islamists, there is an inherent individual commitment to violence that must be countered by a corresponding commitment to stopping violence. The reasoning behind disengagement varies from individual to individual, and encompasses multiple factors.

Individual Disengagement

Disengagement stems primarily from psychological or physical factors. Psychological factors often manifest themselves through disillusionment with the cause, personnel, tactics or even changing personal priorities.[32] A member may find the pressures of belonging to such an inward, "us against the world" group unbearable, and in turn question the priorities that led to their joining the group. This mounting disillusionment is often aggravated when overall group ideology contrasts with the stark reality of violence associated with tactical operations.[33] Sheikh Salman ibn Fahad al-Oudah, a well-known Saudi Scholar posted a letter outlining his disillusionment with al-Qaeda's cause: "Brother Osama. How many wars and how much bloodshed have occurred in the name of Al-Qaeda? How many innocents, old men, children are killed in

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the name of Al-Qaeda? Are you happy to meet God carrying this heavy burden on your shoulders?"[34]

From a physical standpoint, disengagement is the individual's departure from a group. It can, and often does, stem from the psychological reasons discussed previously. Physical disengagement can also be as simple as moving to a support function or the cessation of hostile action. Arrest, incarceration, surrender, and death are common examples of physical disengagement.[35] These examples highlight the fact that physical disengagement can be voluntary, in the case of surrender, or involuntary, in the case of arrest. In the words of one extremist "prison was the best thing to ever happen to me."[36]

The involuntary physical disengagement allowed the time and reflection needed for psychological disengagement. This opportunity for disengagement through incarceration is not always the case, as there is ample evidence, particularly in the case of radical Islam, of prisons existing as a breeding ground for radicalization and recruitment. In a 2006 hearing before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, FBI Deputy Assistant Director Donald Van Duyn noted: "Ideologies that radicalized inmates appear most often to embrace include or are influenced by the Salafi form of Sunni Islam (including revisionist versions commonly known as "prison Islam") and an extremist view of Shia Islam similar to that of the government of Iran and Lebanese Hizballah."[37]

Group Disengagement

There are outward and inward pressures can lead to group disengagement from extremism. A lack of direction within an organization, or a shift in leadership that hinders operational capability can create disillusionment within the group.[38] Many times

peace or a truce between sides can cause an organization to lose focus and disengage.

From a Jihadist perspective, this group disengagement is often born from a pragmatic

assessment of previous events and tactics. This "after-action" assessment of successes

and failures is then balanced by relevant Islamic doctrine and adherence to the tenets of

Islamic law.[39] The resulting revision gives rise to a new ideology defined by establishing

the same Islamic precepts outlined earlier in this paper, but by peaceful means.

Historical Successes and Failures

Examples of efforts at individual and collective disengagement exist throughout

modern conflict. Many governments have come to realize some effort at ideological

reinterpretation is necessary to create sustained change within an extremist organization.

Some of these efforts have met with varying success depending on the methodology

employed and the cultural and religious factors at play.

Irish Republican Army (IRA)

From a group disengagement perspective, the United Kingdom peace process

provided several examples of influencing factors to the peace process. The IRA

highlighted the potential issues that arise from a lack of direction in an organization. In

the ceasefires that existed between 1975 and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998,

members fled to splinter organizations or regressed into petty crimes, robbery or

assaults.[40] Eamon Collins, an IRA intelligence officer, described his turning point in

disengagement after discovering IRA members who had bombed a hotel in Warrenpoint

had also robbed the establishment.[41] This reinforced his growing perception of the

movement as more about petty crime than separatist ideology. The IRA strategy of

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Tactical Use of the Armed Struggle (TUAS) represented a deliberate shift by leadership away from terrorist action and toward peaceful and political resolution of their issues.[42]

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)

Although its roots are from Darul Islam in the 1940's, Jemaah Islamiyah in its current form is a Salafist Jihadist group with ties to Al-Qaeda. JI was responsible for the Bali nightclub bombings from 2002 that killed 202 people and the 2003 Marriott car bomb that killed twelve.[43] It presents a unique example of collective and individual disengagement since several different countries (most notably Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines) have been forced to deal with this group.   The Philippines have had a poor showing in combating JI's influence, while Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have taken a direct approach in establishing programs to encourage disengagement and rehabilitation of former JI members.[44]

These countries employ a theology-based dialogue to provide counter-arguments to the version of Jihad employed by members of imprisoned members of JI. By identifying erroneous interpretations of Jihad, and examining correct methods of Jihad, authorities hope to provide the groundwork for a reinterpretation by these men.[45] It is worth noting, however, that many contend that militants seeking release from prison often abuse this theology dialogue method. Indonesia in particular lacks many of the follow-on counseling and parole visits necessary to prevent recidivism by extremists.[46]

While many of the government run disengagement programs occur in a collective capacity, there is also a prime example of individual disengagement from a senior leader in JI. The departure of Mohammed Nasir Bin Abbas, head of the JI military training division, was a direct result the bombings outside two Bali nightclubs in 2002.[47] Bin

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Abbas could not reconcile this attack, conducted by the men he had trained in Afghanistan, with his own interpretation of Jihad, specifically the killing of innocent civilians.[48] He has since provided assistance to authorities in apprehending members of JI, and continues to provide information and assistance to intelligence services. When asked why he had walked away from JI he replied, "I train people for war, for battle. We are killing for defense. We are fighting for our right, and we are not attacking civilians but soldiers."[49]

Egyptian Jihadi Groups

Elements of both the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Islamic Group experienced a similar pattern of revisionist thought in the late 1990's. Each group, through their individual histories and experiences, had come to realize violent dogma and extremism had not brought about the change in Egyptian society and government they had hoped.[50] The Islamic Group's revisionist pursuit started prior to the 1997 Luxor attack by a splinter element in their organization. The attack was an attempt to discredit the non-violence initiative before it went public in 2002.[51] The Egyptian government provided religious books and access to Islamic scholars from Azhar University and the Muslim Brotherhood to discuss and debate disengagement.[52] The revisionist doctrine from The Islamic Group encompasses 27 different books and pamphlets covering a broad range of issues.[53] The result of their revision is a belief in the jurisprudence of utility versus injury instead of the jurisprudence of Jihad.[54] Simply put, Jihad is subjugated to the greater welfare of fellow Muslims, and forbids the use of violence or force to change a Muslim's perceived sinful behavior. As a direct result of the success of the Islamic Group's de-

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radicalization efforts The Egyptian government released several thousand prisoners in 2003.[55]

The Egyptian Islamic Jihad represented the next effort by the Egyptian government at collective disengagement. This process was more difficult than with the Islamic Group, and was possible only after the revisionist text written by Sayyid Imam al-Sharif.   His text 'Rationalizing Jihadist Action in Egypt and the World' started the ideological revision of Jihad, due in large part to the respect al-Sharif demanded within the ranks of Jihadists around the world.[56] This paper will examine al-Sharif's Jihadist and revisionist writing in more detail in the next section. Overall, these Egyptian collective disengagement programs, by means of theological dialogue and self-examination, have been successful thanks to practical and realistic support during the process of disengagement.[57]

SECTION IV – CASE STUDY 1 – SAYYID IMAM AL-SHARIF

It is a fair assertion that Al-Qaeda was one of the most impactful terrorist groups of the last twenty years. The doctrinal development of this group sprang, in part, from the writings of Sayyid Imam al-Sharif. Examining his personal evolution from Jihadist to revisionist displayed the flaws in Al-Qaeda's Shari'ah and Qur'an based arguments for violence against non-believers and Muslims. It also highlights the evolution of revision within the Egyptian Jihadist groups of the 1990's.

Historical Background

Sayyid Imam al-Sharif is arguably one of the more influential Jihadist philosophers of the late 20th century. In 1950, Al-Sharif was born in Bani Suwyf, Egypt. His interest in the Koran and its teachings started early in his childhood where he memorized the

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Koran and began religious writings.[58] He enrolled and later graduated in 1974 from the medical school at the University of Cairo, where he became interested in the rapidly emerging Jihadist student movements.[59] It was during this period al-Sharif first crossed paths with Ayman al-Zawahiri. Throughout the next decade al-Sharif participated in the growing Jihadist movement in Egypt. He assumed command of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad in 1987 and proceeded to write two of Jihadists' most influential texts, *Essential Guide for Preparation* and *The Compendium in Pursuit of Noble Knowledge.*[60]

Al-Sharif's influence expanded and grew until his writings represented the modern ideological foundation for Global Jihadist thought. In 1991 al-Zawahiri took over tactical employment of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and oversaw their campaign of violence, along with the Islamic Group, against the Egyptian government through the systematic targeting of government officials, sympathizers, and tourists.[61] This failed effort resulted in thousands of EIJ followers being arrested and imprisoned in 1993, and al-Sharif disengaged from the group and returned to practicing medicine in Yemen.[62] After the events of 9/11 al-Sharif was detained by Yemeni authorities and turned over to the Egyptian government to begin serving a life sentence for his work with the Egyptian Islamic Jihad.[63] In Egypt's notorious Tora Prison al-Sharif began his discovery of revisionist Jihadist thought.

Early Extremist Doctrine

Sayyid Imam al-Sharif's first book, *al-'Umda fi I'dad al-'Udda or Essential Guide for Preparation,* provided the logic and support of the teachings of the Qur'an to justify Jihad as a violent means of resistance. In this book, al-Sharif gives guidelines to the Jihadist, and declares Jihad as a religious exercise and duty that will result in heavenly

rewards.[64] This book highlights not only the proper code of conduct for Jihadist action, but also the philosophical and religious origins allowing it.[65]

Al-Sharif takes a similar tact in *al-Jami'fi talab al-'ilm al-sharif or The Compendium in Pursuit of Noble Knowledge.* His discussion of Salafist-Jihadism established that any government operating outside of *Shari'ah* was *takfir,* and thus an apostate regime that must be overthrown.[66] The next level of this evolution of Jihad was to declare anyone who worked with the government or participated in government by voting was in essence dismissing the *hakimiyyah,* and was labeled *takfir* and targeted.[67] Imam al-Sharif even declares in his writings, "The infidel's rule, his prayers, and the prayers of those who pray behind him are invalid. His blood is legal."[68] By narrowly defining what it means to be a true believer of the faith he creates the opportunity for Jihadists to declare openly those who oppose them as *takfir*. This absolves the Jihadist of the thorniest and most difficult part of Jihad…the attacks on fellow Muslims.

Doctrinal Recantation

Al-Sharif's 2007 release of the *Wathiqat Tarshid Al-'Aml Al-Jihadi fi Misr w'Al-'Alam (Document to Rationalizing Jihadist Action in Egypt and the World)* stunned the Jihadist world. His recantation dismantles the very framework of Jihad he has constructed with his earlier works. Core elements of Jihadist action, such as attacks based on nationality, destruction of property, targeting tourists and non-Muslims in Muslim countries, or attacking the government of a country they live in, are all violations of Islamic law.[69] Another blow to Jihadist groups is the denial of *takfir* as a means of violence against Muslims and non-Muslims. "In backing away from the practice of *takfir* in relation to fellow Muslims, Jihadi revisionism re-establishes a person's faith is a

private matter known only to God. It cannot be determined by outward behavior, and individual Muslims do not possess the religious authority to condemn others as unbelievers."[70]

Al-Sharif provides a compelling backdrop by making both individual restrictions on Jihad, such as an individual cannot wage Jihad if they are in debt or it endangers their family, and collective restrictions against groups waging Jihad by illegal means like theft or murder of innocents.[71] Rationalizing Jihadist Action also says as long as Muslims are given safety in foreign lands, then foreigners and innocents in Muslim lands are protected under the principle of "like treatment."[72]

Analysis of Revisionist Thought

The importance of al-Sharif's revisionist writings are evident when you examine the men who stepped forward to refute his new beliefs. Al-Zawahiri devoted an entire 200-page document entitled *The Exoneration* to refute al-Sharif's assertions on Jihad.[73] Al-Zawahiri's attempts to discredit his former colleague run the gambit from presenting other ideological counterpoints from Jihadist scholars to mocking the influence or importance of al-Sharif's work. While there is undoubtedly widespread impact from al-Sharif's revisionist Jihadist writings, many question whether his writings were coerced by psychological pressure or torture at the hands of the Egyptian government.[74]

To counter this belief al-Sharif gave an interview with Al Hayat where he states unequivocally, "People hate America, and the Islamist movements feel their hatred and their impotence. Ramming America has become the shortest road to fame and leadership among the Arabs and Muslims. What good is it if you destroy one of your enemy's buildings, and he destroys one of your countries? What good is it if you kill one of his

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people, and he kills a thousand of yours? That is my evaluation of 9/11."[75] Al-Sharif

also expands on his new definition of Jihad as a duty of pious Muslims, but he defines it

specifically as a defensive duty as opposed to an offensive duty.[76] This definition further

restricts Jihadist action, particularly when coupled with Al-Sharif's declaration that

treacherous attacks after receiving asylum in foreign lands are illegal. Al-Sharif writes

about this belief in *Rationalizing Jihadist Action* and notes:

> I say it is not honorable to reside with people, even if they were non-
> believers and not part of a treaty; even if they gave you permission to enter
> their homes and reside in them and they gave you the security for yourself
> and your money; even if they gave you the opportunity to work or to study
> or they granted you political asylum with a decent life and other acts of
> kindness, and then you betray them through killing and destruction. This
> was not in the manners and practices of the prophet, prayers and peace be
> upon him. The Exalted says: 'Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a
> beautiful pattern (of conduct) ' [Koranic verse; Al-Ahzab 33:21][77]

Sayyid Imam Al-Sharif's departure from the tenets and methodology of Jihad has given

many former militants an opportunity to begin their own process of self-reflection. His

vast knowledge of the Qur'an and its application to Shar'iah made his revisionist writings

even more compelling. From an individual perspective, Al-Sharif was the perfect

scholarly emissary of moderate reinterpretation. He represents a fracture in the like-

minded ideology of extremist Jihad, and potentially a way forward for efforts to introduce

a moderate interpretation into the discussion of Islamist dogma.

SECTION V – CASE STUDY 2– LIBYAN ISLAMIC FIGHTING GROUP

Equally important to the pursuit of moderate interpretation Jihad was the

transition of an established Jihadist group from violent extremism to moderate

revisionism--the LIFG provided this transition. The LIFG has evolved from Islamist

mujahedeen fighters, to Jihadists resistant of an oppressive autocratic regime, and

finally to self-examining revisionists. They provided a striking example of the evolution

and "maturing" of a group away from an initial embrace of radical violence as a means to

achieve objectives.

Historical Background

Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyyah al-Muqatilah fi-Libya or the LIFG has a murkier history

than other groups discussed in this paper, but they represent an interesting crossroads of

government interaction, mujahedeen pedigree, and revisionist examination. Formal

declaration of the LIFG as an organization occurred in 1995, but the group's roots can be

found in the covert Jihadist groups from the early 1980's were later active in the Soviet

resistance in Afghanistan.[78] The impetus for these fighters to coalesce under the banner

of the LIFG was the desire to overthrow Qadhafi as the leader of Libya. When Qadhafi

gained power in Libya he had consulted the religious authorities, but slowly changed over

time as his power solidified, culminating in some changes to the faith that enraged the

conservative nature of many Libyan Muslims.[79] Any resistance was met with brutal

oppression, arrest and torture at the hands of Qadhafi's regime. The LIFG resistance

continued to escalate, and in 1996, there were multiple attempts by the LIFG to

assassinate Qadhafi.[80]

The Qadhafi regime gained the upper hand in the run up to 9/11, arresting,

imprisoning, or killing many of the leaders of the LIFG.[81] After the attacks on 9/11, the

US government added the LIFG to the terrorist list, although the organization has been

careful to limit their overt interactions with al-Qaeda.[82] This does not diminish the

ideological and leadership links between the groups, with al- Zawahri praising the LIFG

spiritual leader, al-Saidi, and another LIFG leader, al-Qayed, who is the older brother of

Al-Qaeda spokesman al-Libi.[83]   Both of these LIFG leaders played a role in the writing

and release of the recantation documents in 2009.[84]

Early Extremist Doctrine

As with many of the extremist groups discussed in this paper, the LIFG has its

early ideological underpinnings rooted in Salafist teachings. There are no distinct

writings attributed directly to the leaders of the LIFG aside from a book written by Abu

al-Mundhir Sami al-Sa'idi, a religious leader within the LIFG, and his teachings echo the

writings of Abdallah Azzam and Sa'id Qutb concerning Western nationalism as a

replacement for Shari'ah. Specifically, the LIFG viewed the Qadhafi regime as a *Jahili* or

heretic regime operating outside the boundaries of Islamic law.[85] This meant it was the

duty of all Muslims to resist the *takfir* government and bring about Islamist control based

on Shari'ah. It is an important distinction, however, to note the LIFG did very little in the

way of Global Jihad, despite their links with Al-Qaeda. Their mission, until their

recantation in 2009, was the removal of the near-threat represented by the apostate

regime of Qadhafi, and their attacks were confined to a specific geographic area.[86]

Doctrinal Recantation

In 2009, after two years of careful negotiation with the Libyan government, and

with special intercession by Saif Islam Qadhafi, the son of Muamar Qadhafi, the LIFG

announced the release of *Corrective Studies in Understanding Jihad, Accountability and

the Judgment of People.*[87] The leadership of the LIFG took a jurisprudence-based

approach to renouncing Jihad by examining many of the precepts of Jihadist thought and

providing scholarly rebuttals. They discuss the absence of scholars of religion to evaluate

the pros and cons of Jihadist action, and assert the protection of the Muslim community

should be the primary objective.[88] From the standpoint of a "code of conduct" for Jihad, the *Corrective Studies* mirrors many of the ideas outlined by al-Sharif in his recantation. It is unethical and immoral to kill women, children, the elderly, or merchants, and it is illegal to use treachery in the pursuit of Jihad.[89]

Analysis of Revisionist Thought

Unlike al-Sharif's *Rationalizing Jihad*, the LIFG's recantation does not engage in any personal attacks, but attempts a methodical analysis of the deficiencies of Global Jihad.[90] Noman Benotman, a former LIFG leader, makes an interesting point about the purpose of *Corrective Studies:*"The most important strategic impact of this 478 page book is not that it has pragmatically denounced violence, but that it has ideologically delegitimized violence."[91] While the LIFG recantation does discuss the limits and parameters of judging the belief's of other Muslims, it falls short of a direct indictment or repudiation of the tenet of *takfir*.[92] This should not diminish the importance of the LIFG's efforts. One year after the release of *Corrective Studies* an article in magharebia.com noted: "after the publication of the (LIFG) revisions in its complete version, there has been no Islamic legal reasoning from Al-Qaeda or its supporters rejecting what the LIFG presented. This clearly indicates critics have not found any Islamic jurisprudential deficiencies in the principles on which the LIFG leaders based their conclusions."[93] Despite this praise of the LIFG's efforts in revisionist Jihadist thought, the larger question springs from what, if any, involvement they will have in the anti-regime developments in Libya.

The protests within Libya in February 2011 provided a compelling backdrop to assess the LIFG's intent. Roughly 24 hours after the Libyan government released 110

former LIFG prisoners on 16 February 2011, pro-democracy protests erupted in the

Benghazi, Libya.[94] The growing power vacuum within Libya created an opportunity for

assessment of the LIFG's true intent after reconciliation and release from Libyan jails. As

of this writing, there had been minimal direct reporting of LIFG involvement in the

changes that swept Libya, but they could play a significant role in any new regime

changes.

SECTION VI – CASE STUDY 3– THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

In as much as the LIFG represented the evolution of an entire organization

towards a nonviolent reinterpretation of Jihad, the Muslim Brotherhood represented the

next evolution of an Islamist group into a social outreach organization, and more

importantly, a political organization. From that end, the case study analysis for the

Muslim Brotherhood will address political ideology as it relates to their Islamist roots,

and what impact this ideology may have on the 2011 political upheaval in Egypt.

Historical Background

Much of the historical context of the Muslim Brotherhood through the early

1970's was discussed previously in this paper. The Brotherhood's move from violence to

community outreach was a pragmatic decision following the crackdown from Sadat's

regime.[95] From that narrative, the Brotherhood has spent the better part of four decades

revising and revamping Islamic principles from a nonviolent perspective. The 1980's

saw the rise and growth of the Muslim Brotherhood into an outreach organization that

operated within university groups, and sought ways to establish its organizational

framework.[96] Egyptian President Sadat and later Mubarak recognized the Muslim

Brotherhood provided a balance against leftist political forces that objected to the regime,

and right leaning ultra-conservative Islamist groups.[97] Through the 1990's the Muslim

Brotherhood consolidated control of professional and student organizations, and used

these groups as a platform for social support.[98] The Brotherhood offered every manner of

social assistance the Egyptian government's corrupt bureaucracy failed to deliver, to

include student financial aid, health insurance, and even emergency assistance.[99]

While the extremist violence of the late 1990's in Egypt was primarily a product

of *takfir* organizations like the Islamic Group and Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Muslim

Brotherhood also dealt with the crackdown from the Mubarak regime. The Muslim

Brotherhood remained true to its pursuit of Islamist principles by operating within the

system, although this effort did have some dissent within the Brotherhood. The

November 2005 elections provided needed vindication for these efforts, when the

Brotherhood won 20 percent of the assembly seats in the election.[100] The Muslim

Brotherhood's platform had very little to do with Islamist or religious ideology, and more

to do with affordable housing, safety measures on public transportation, and judicial

reform.[101]

After the historic events that led to the ouster of Mubarak in January of 2011, the

Muslim Brotherhood was thrust onto the international stage. Even a casual student of the

Egyptian politics recognized with the Mubarak regime dismantled the Muslim

Brotherhood and the grassroots effort it had built over the years was now the most

powerful political force in Egypt. With the eyes of the world on Egypt, and the entire

Middle East shaking from the shifting of power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, and

Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood sits at a crossroads between Islamist group and political

group that may serve as the model for other organizations throughout the region.

Political Doctrine

The Muslim Brotherhood seeks to bring about political change that will restore Shari'ah based jurisprudence through a council of Islamic scholars.[102] This one aspect of The Brotherhoods politics is a double-edged sword. It maintains the loyalty of some of the more conservative members of the Brotherhood towards political action, but strikes fear in most liberal and non-Muslim Egyptians that the Brotherhood is seeking to establish an Islamic theocracy.[103] In a similarly difficult issue to navigate, the Brotherhood also believes high position within the government cannot be held by Coptic Christians or women since the government will be guided along Islamic principles and law.[104] From an economic standpoint, the Brotherhood believed in government protection and assistance for the underprivileged and disadvantaged sections of society.[105]

Analysis of Political Thought

Several unique challenges exist from a political as well as an Islamist perspective for the Muslim Brotherhood. From a Western perspective, the organization is tainted for its associations and perceived support of more extremist iterations such as Hamas and Hezbollah. The Muslim Brotherhood exists across the Middle East and Europe, but each country has, in fact, its own version of the Brotherhood, and is subject to competing influences and restrictions specific to that country.[106] The larger issue for the Brotherhood and the greatest concern for Egypt internally and externally, is the ability of Islamist organizations to reconcile their religious ideology with democratic ideology.

The argument has been made by spokesmen for the Brotherhood that democracy

and Islamist thought are not mutually exclusive. In a February 2011 interview on National Public Radio Muslim Brotherhood spokesman Essam el-Errian addressed the issue and noted "Democracy is built on (unintelligible), which is universal and humanitarian. Human dignity, development, equality, and freedom…all of these principles are the point of Islam. Therefore, Islam is compatible with democracy. Our democracy will be unique because it joined in morality, worship and also we can add to this democracy our Islamic spirit."[107]

Issues abound for the Islamist organization seeking fair and democratic elections. Questions concerning pluralism, universal civil rights, minority rights, women's rights and of course the application of Shari'ah are all relevant concerns should an Islamist group such as the Brotherhood achieve power through elections.[108] Democratic reform in an Islamic nation could take a form the US would not recognize as democratic. Elements of the Muslim Brotherhood recognize the gap between US ideology on democracy and Islamist ideology on democracy. Issam al-Aryan, a Brotherhood spokesman aptly sums of this differing view of the democratic ideal.

> "Will the West accept a different model of democracy in Islamic countries, a model which uses Islam as source of authority [marja'iyyah], where religion is a fundamental core of politics, where the people have the power to appoint, observe and dismiss [the ruler], yet sovereignty [hakimiyyah] belongs to the shari'ah? And will the West accept an Islamic model that gives peoples the right to elect parliaments, state councils and local bodies to make laws "in the framework of the Islamic source of authority, so that these legislative bodies will neither permit that which is forbidden [by shari'ah] nor forbid that which is permitted [by it]?"[109]

The changes in the Middle East are real, powerful, and ongoing. It is critical for the United States to examine ways to promote democracy abroad, protect US interests, and maintain security.

SECTION VII – RECOMMENDATIONS

"For 60 years, the United States pursued stability at the expense of democracy in the Middle East—and we achieved neither."
<div align="right">- Condoleezza Rice, Cairo, Egypt 2005</div>

By mid-February 2011, protests had erupted in Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, Djibouti, Tunisia, Iran and Lebanon. The outcome of these protests, at the time of this writing, remains unclear. As the balance of power shifts in this volatile region it is critical to assess Islamist movements, and in particular revisionist movements, with a critical eye. The impetus for the protests appears to be a spontaneous desire for free and fair elections, coupled with poor economic opportunities for a growingly disaffected youth population. Oppressive autocratic regimes are scrambling to find ways to halt these protests or establish reforms. Some countries like Tunisia and Egypt have already seen regime change occur, others like Jordan are implementing broad reforms, and still others like Libya and Iran are reacting with force to suppress protests.

New Fault Lines

Western governments are caught in the precarious position of choosing between the stability many of these autocratic regimes represented and the uncertainty comes from a pluralist democratic movement. The fact remains, elements in this region of the world support some component of Islamist government through Shari'ah law. Many question if these ideologies are compatible with democratic reform. Examining if Islamist ideals are or are not compatible is a discussion for another thesis. The new reality is that in some areas of the Middle East, democratic reform is coming…in one fashion or another. The larger issue is the US faces the reality of Islamist revisionism that may represent a new,

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credible political/religious platform in the emerging Middle Eastern power paradigm. The method of US interaction in the region could shape, in all likelihood, the tenor and purpose of our foreign policy for the next twenty years. The US must establish a way to balance the push for reform against the real threat of pro-Islamist political groups taking shape in the region.

If Samuel Huntington was correct, and the clash of civilizations occurs at the macro-level between states of differing civilizations, and the micro-level between adjacent groups along the fault lines of these different civilizations, then the outbreak of democracy represents a new fault line in the Middle Eastern landscape.[110] This fault line exists along several different planes simultaneously. Many view it as the standard argument of Democratic versus Islamist ideology, and the measure of compatibility of the two. It also exists as a fault line between the moderate voices in Islam and the extremist ideologues who denounce democracy as incompatible with the tenets of Shari'ah. Finally, the spontaneous groundswell of protests in early 2011 represents a fault line between the young in the Middle East who, due to the internet and social media, exist in world of information and globalization that has allowed them to witness the opportunities available in other societies, but denied them these opportunities in their society.

Huntington addresses the phenomenon of democracy in the Arab world and notes "openings in Arab political systems have already occurred. The principal beneficiaries of these openings have been Islamist movements. In the Arab world, in short, Western democracy strengthens anti-Western political forces."[111] Huntington also surmises this may be a passing phenomenon, and conditions and circumstances in 2011 seem to indicate a new opportunity to explore political reform in the region. The political

protests in the region have very little to do with the standard reasons for protest in the region like the Palestinian/Israeli conflict or perceived American Imperialism, and have much more to do with opportunity, oppression, justice and progress.[112] This should not allay all concerns about Islamist influence in the region. There can be little doubt Islamist elements seek to capitalize on this opportunity. The United States must examine these new fault lines for opportunities to influence and assist where possible, and continue to serve the needs of security and freedom where required.

Soft Power, Credibility, and Security

Dr. Joseph Nye coined the terminology "soft power" as it applies to international relations as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion and payment."[113]   The developments in the Middle East have thrown the doors wide for employment of soft power by the United States. The US government's ability to employ diplomatic and informational soft power can enhance its ability to promote democracy and pluralism within the Middle East. If the US is going to accomplish effective utilization of soft power, it must establish and maintain credibility on the issue of democracy. A quick glance at US history over the preceding 50 years shows a litany of choices the US has made where security has trumped the uncertainty of regime change. Too often, the US military is called to fight the very despots that were propped up twenty years earlier to prevent regional instability. Dr. Nye aptly describes the soft power capabilities of the US as, "The attractiveness of the United States rests on resources such as its culture (sometimes), its political values of democracy and human rights (when it lives up to them), and its policies (when they are framed with some humility and awareness of others' interests)."[114]

After a decade of US application of military and economic hard power, this combination of revisionist Jihadist thought and spontaneous reformist protest is the perfect storm. The best option for US intervention is the encouragement of free and fair elections that respect the dignity and rights of all groups. Actually, promoting democracy in the region is best served by minimal direct intervention by the United States. By not engaging in the promotion of one candidate over another or one party over another the US regains the true currency of soft power—credibility. This credibility can be parlayed into actions to promote economic opportunities for the disaffected youth in the region, and lift them from an existence without options that leaves them vulnerable to radicalization.

The possibility does exist, however, that a pro-Islamic government will be elected under free elections in one or more of these nations. The US has an obligation to influence the definition of democracy as the free exercise of religion and thought. The question of compatibility with Shari'ah is a fair one, and has not been adequately addressed by moderate and fundamentalist leaders. One avenue to influence change is through the case studies offered in this paper. Recognizing the differences, or fault lines, between these groups provides insight into diplomatic and informational efforts can induce change from within Islamist groups. Much like the reform protests of January and February 2011, this ideological shift was not a direct result of US hard or soft power, but an evolution of ideology independent of US action.

SECTION VIII – CONCLUSIONS

"For too long, many nations, including my own, tolerated, even excused, oppression in the Middle East in the name of stability. Oppression became common, but stability never arrived. We must take a different approach. We must help the reformers of the middle east as they work for freedom, and strive to build a community of peaceful, democratic nations."

                    -President George W. Bush, Speech to UN General Assembly, 2004

Some might argue the recommendations offered are mutually exclusive, and the United States cannot promote democracy in the Middle East through soft power, encourage moderate reinterpretations of Islamist thought, and maintain national security interests abroad. However, these efforts are actually intertwined. These movements within the Middle East will result in a rise of political/religious groups, and the men and organizations discussed in this paper will play a hand in forming these groups. Each player must be examined now for the impact of his ideology on elections and the fair application of democracy. The US cannot afford to paint all Islamic groups with the broad brush of "extremist." The differences between groups and ideologies must be examined, understood, and utilized for their effect on these new reformist efforts.

Al-Sharif, the LIFG, and the Muslim Brotherhood may not represent the full rise of moderate Islamist thought, but they do represent a break from the status quo of radicalized Jihadist dogma. Their religious and political influence will only continue to rise, and understanding their objectives is essential to continued US efforts in the region.

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